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ABSTRACT

Index cards and audio tape can make the steps of the SQ3R system of study more concrete. This method can be particularly beneficial to "average" college students, who for whatever reason, have difficulty sustaining concentration while reading. The SQ3R method is suitable because of its simplicity, diversity of application, adaptability to differences in students, and provisions for repetition and synthesis. With a little experimentation, the student will instinctively know which of the two modes works better, the note cards or the tape recording. The cards may be used almost anywhere, as can the recorder, with earphones. In the survey step, the student either writes down or records the main headings of the chapter. The student then creates questions about the material, which are also written or recorded. During the reading, the student writes or records details under the major headings. When the student recites the materials, the index cards may be used as flash cards or the recording may be used to check accuracy. In the review step, the student may reread the cards or listen to the tape as often as needed. The SQ3R beefed up with cards or tapes seems to be more profitable than merely underlining. (Illustrations of the note card method are included.) (HTH)

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TWO METHODS FOR MAKING THE STEPS OF THE SQ3R MORE CONCRETE

paper given at

College Reading Association
Baltimore, Maryland
October 1980

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TWO METHODS FOR MAKING THE STEPS OF THE SQ3R MORE CONCRETE

Who among us has not read that the SQ3R method that has been taught to generations of students has been shown to be not useful by research? Well, despite recent research suggesting that the SQ3R method is no better than anything else a student might do to reinforce his reading of textbooks, a system such as the SQ3R has its place in the college reading class. It is arguable that the SQ3R itself is suitable to the needs of the typical college reading student. However he studies, the student will retain information longer if he uses some method of reinforcing the mental steps he takes in studying, and the SQ3R offers opportunities for reinforcement. Index cards and audio tape can make the steps in the system of study more concrete. Therefore, I suggest using cards or tape to make the steps in the SQ3R more concrete. Though a student might not be attracted to either of these materials for this pupose, he should know that they can be used. Let's consider how a typical reading student might benefit from such an approach.

THE NEED FOR A STUDY SYSTEM SUCH AS THE SQ3R

Although every reading teacher has met him, let me introduce you to Joe, who is typical, at least, of my reading students. Joe graduated from high school three months ago and worked in the Dairy Queen over the summer. Though he was not a *star* athlete, Joe played football or baseball on his high school team. He was not a star student, either, in high school and was satisfied with his 2.32 GPA on graduation. His ACT scores ranged from 16 in the sciences to 6 in English, which he despises. The social studies score was 8. Joe *hopes* that he can finish an AA in Small

Business Technology or in Computer Technology, and knows that he might decide later to transfer to the university to work on his bachelor's. Remember that we have noted that he *hopes* he can make it. Hope differs from burning enthusiasm. Also, because Joe has never been a good student, he does not expect to be one in college, either. If a 2.00 average is "good enough" to squeeze by on, it is "good enough" for Joe.

Clearly, before Joe ever steps into the shadow of the administration building, he is in for a rough time. He is an unprepared non-scholar who does not expect to do well.

Let's consider what his being a non-scholar sets him up for. In high school, a pretense, any display of effort, assured him of a C or better. In college, what he considers a great display of enthusiasm falls miles short of what he needs. If he breaks up his viewing of Monday Night Football by leafing through his biology text and reading a sentence or two at random here and there, he feels that he has studied for three hours.

Joe is primed to be not only through the revolving door of an open-admissions college but back out onto the porch before he realizes that he does not know how to try to study.

Joe has never really tried to do anything associated with school work, so he does not know how to try. He remembers that in high school the time not in class was time to socialize and otherwise entertain himself. Therefore, if we reading teachers can give him a set of steps to exercise on his assignments, we are at least giving him a way to begin. If we leave him to his own devices, he will do as he did in high school, and his spare time will fill up with pinball machines, bull sessions, cigarette smoke and reruns of Leave It to Beaver and The Brady Bunch.

A study system such as the SQ3R supplies at least a way to start reading in college, a set of directions, a blueprint. Judging from what we know about Joe, we suspect that he knows he does not know how to begin.

Thus, we can say that Joe needs a "crutch," a system by which to organize information, something active to do with his time, a way of providing repetition of concepts.

THE SUITABILITY OF THE SQ3R TO COLLEGE READING STUDENTS

Our typical reading student needs study skills that are easy to use, widely applicable, flexible, and based on some reasonably apparent need. The SQ3R meets these criteria.

Joe needs something simple, and the SQ3R is. He can learn the steps to it in ten minutes. He needs a method to attack whatever he wants to study, and the SQ3R will stretch from sociology to English and from physical education to geology. Joe is unique, but the SQ3R is readily adaptable to his personality and will not explode in his face if he decides to leave out a step or two or to modify a few steps. Finally, Joe is not one of the shining geniuses of the current college generation. Again, the SQ3R is useful to him because it supplies both repetition, which he knows that he needs, and the system for him to synthesize and reorder information, both of which are essential to understanding and retaining information.

Thus, we can say that the SQ3R is suitable because of its simplicity, diversity of application, adaptability to differences in students, and provisions for repetition and synthesis.

THE NEED FOR REINFORCING THE MENTAL STEPS IN THE STUDY SYSTEM

Why can Joe not just sit down and read through a chapter, or read through it and use the SQ3R in the usual way, and walk away from the desk with the chapter well in mind? First, let's remember what we learned about Joe when we heard about his background. Before he ever parked his car on campus, he was an unprepared non-scholar. Now that he is on campus, his problems have multiplied.

As we know, Joe is not intellectually gifted. Much as I distrust standardized IQ scores, I feel comfortable in casually thinking of him as "average." We know that Joe has not pushed himself to study in high school, so he is not used to sustained attention toward his school work. Because Joe also knows these things about himself, he is scared, unsure about whether he should stay in college. He is also overwhelmed by the amount he has to learn. And, tragically for his GPA, he is the average, easy-to-get-along-with type who knows a little about sports and thus is invited to, or at least expected at, all athletic events, beer parties, television lounges, bars, and swim parties in the river.

What does all of this have to do with the need for him to use mechanical means to reinforce the steps he uses in a study system? Being "average" and casual toward his studies and scared and overwhelmed and popular, Joe has, we should not be surprised to learn, trouble concentrating. His mind is pulled so many ways at any moment that for him to fix his attention on any point--especially one having to do with schoolwork--is more likely to happen if he has some record of a small part of the content to attend to. Whatever Joe can use to make the abstract ideas he is supposed to handle more concrete,

better pinned down, will help him.

Thus, Joe needs activity-oriented steps for his study system because he is "average," scared, overwhelmed, and social.

THE USE OF INDEX CARDS AND AUDIO TAPES TO MAKE THE STEPS MORE CONCRETE

Joe, regardless of how dependent he is upon financial aid, can afford index cards, and he probably has a cassette recorder. If he does not have a recorder, the kid across the hall in the dorm does. Second-rate tapes, which are good enough to study by, are sold cheaply in dime and discount stores. Thus, we have two kinds of cheap, available materials to work with.

The index cards and the tapes are ways for Joe to "nail down" the information he is supposed to be mastering. The cards become the familiar note cards that generations of students have used. The tape becomes one side of a conversation between Joe and himself. The cards and the tape offer Joe a variety of modalities, infinite repetition, and a trickle of small pieces of information rather than a flood of course content. Though neither note cards nor audio tapes are on the cutting edge of methodology, both are useful and can sustain Joe as he trudges through the steps of the SQ3R.

The two materials offer the chances to use several modalities. In both preparation and use, the cards are visual and tactile, while the tapes are primarily auditory. Read aloud, the cards become auditory. Done to follow a textbook or the cards, the making of the tapes employs the visual. Joe learns better by one modality than by another, but neither he nor we know which is best for him. With a little experimentation, he instinctively finds it.

Either material offers endless repetition. The cards may be used almost anywhere, in any order, at any speed, in clusters of any size. With an earplug on the tape player, the tapes can be used almost anywhere, for minutes or for hours, and with or without spoken or other response. In the student union or on a bus, in the library or on the dorm's porch, they are easy to handle and usable.

Finally, the two materials offer Joe one of the most helpful characteristics that learning theory suggests materials can have: the content is served up in small pieces. As we have seen, Joe is not used to taking on big blocks of information, so this feature of using either the cards or the tapes is especially useful to him.

Therefore, the cards or the tapes offer the advantages of many modalities, repeatability, and small pieces of information.

STEPS FOR USING THE CARDS

The steps of the SQ3R--survey, question, read, recite, review--can be reinforced on notecards. The following sample textbook passages are from Adelstein and Pival's The Writing Commitment, 2nd edition, 1980, used by permission of Harcourt, Brace, Jovanovich. I am especially happy to use this text for illustrations because of the acceptance it has received this year from my composition and shetoric students.

Survey. The survey is shown on the cards by headings, or by parts of headings, from the textbook, with the page number jotted at the top and with only one heading or subheading per card. Illustrations 1, 2, and 3 show pages 196, 197 and 198 from The Writing Commitment. Illustration 4 shows how the headings from these pages could appear on a stack of cards.

Question. Joe finishes the headings on the cards covering the assigned chapter or section, lays the textbook aside, and runs through the cards, creating questions about the topics and asking himself what he knows about the topics he will be reading on. The questions he produces are then written under their respective headings. In this step, Joe should realize that serious problems in formulating questions are warnings that the passage will require considerable care. Illustration 5 shows his first few cards, with his questions added.

Read. Then, he reads the assignment, adding notes to his cards to explain the headings and perhaps to give a few details. The notecards must not become crowded, for a crowded note is hard to use. Illustrations 6 and 7 show the four cards to which we added questions in the last step, but now with brief notes added. While he takes these notes, he underlines in his textbook or makes marginal notations or makes separate reading notes to highlight content that will not fit onto his cards. Illustration 8 shows how his additional text notations might appear.

Recite. As he does paragraph and chapter recitations, he uses his cards as flash cards, glancing at the heading and then looking away from the card to check his ability to recite the content under the heading. The stack of cards dwindles as he masters the content under the separate headings. Of course, he supplements the recitations of the cards with recitations of marked or highlighted portions of the chapter itself, or of a longer set of reading notes.

Review. Finally, he uses the cards for review. In this step, he can add

illustrations or a few essential points to the cards, use the cards as flash cards for further recitation, and, starting with the cards in order, use them to remind himself of the "high spots" in the chapter as he rereads sections of it. As a final review, again of the "high spots", he can use the cards by themselves.

STEPS FOR USING THE TAPE

The cassette tape can reinforce the steps of the SQ3R and give Joe a chance to hear the content of the chapter. The tapes supplement the steps of the system and give Joe something tangible, other than the then forbidding textbook, that presents the content of the assignment.

Survey. While he previews the chapter, Joe reads all headings and illustration titles, if any, onto the tape.

Question. In the questioning step, after recording each heading, Joe stops to create his own questions about the topic and to consider what he knows about the topic. Again, if producing questions is difficult, the difficulty itself warns Joe that the passage will require strict attention.

Read. During the reading step, Joe begins where the tape finishes the first reading of the heading and the questions. This time, he reads the heading and chooses what he considers the most important points under it before recording the heading and the content he selects to support it. While he selects the content to record, he underlines in his text or makes marginal notations to highlight the content which supports and illustrates the passages chosen for the tape. Of course, the material recorded in this step may or may not answer the questions he generated when he started on the

passage. What counts here is that they answer legitimate questions about the content of the passage.

We can understand how the survey, question, and read steps would sound on tape by considering sample entries based on pages 199 and 200 of The Writing Commitment. Illustration 9 shows page 199 from the text, with some important points underlined. Illustration 10 suggests what content might be taped. Page 200 from the text appears in Illustration 11, again with some underlining. An example of what might be recorded as the highlights from this page is shown in Illustration 12. After seeing these examples, you will hear them on tape.

Recite. This reading of selected materials onto the tape is half of the recitation. The other half comes when he replays the tape during study sessions, stopping it after each heading to recite the content after that heading, which he then plays to check himself. This recitation to the tape complements his recitation and review of the chapter itself, and gives repetition on what he considers the most important points.

Review. To review the assignment, Joe can replay the tape as often as he wishes, listening to it by itself or following along with the textbook. He can recite as much as he wants during the reviews, as well, even adding materials under the headings to that he recorded, to make the text recitation overlap the tape recitation.

SUMMARY

The methods suggested here for using the cards and the tapes grow out of the common-sense notion that Joe needs a push to start thinking about

and dealing with the content which he would otherwise either find unapproachable or read passively and without one splinter of retention. The cards and the tapes keep Joe's hands, and, we hope, his mind, occupied. While some argue that the SQ3R is no more productive than underlining, it seems that the SQ3R beefed up with either the cards or the tapes is a much less passive and thus much more profitable activity than mere underling.

Can we explain in seventy-five words or less the potential benefits of reinforcing the familiar old study system with cards or tapes? We can say that they allow us to isolate information central to the assignment, write or record it in small pieces that are easy to use, and consider those small pieces as nuclei around which to cluster the many concepts, definitions, illustrations, arguments, and facts which are retained through the study of a reading assignment on which we use the SQ3R in the normal way.

Illustration 1

Pre-Writing and Exposition

The art of writing consists of more than the act of writing. Already you are familiar with revising and proofreading, two necessary and important steps occurring *after* writing a first draft. Now we wish to discuss pre-writing, another key part of the writing process, which, as its name indicates, occurs *before* writing a first draft.

Pre-writing involves four steps:

1. selecting a topic
2. limiting the topic
3. formulating a thesis statement
4. developing a plan or outline

In writing your personal and descriptive papers, you may have engaged in these activities. But you probably found it relatively simple to select and limit your topic and organize your paper. It was probably easy to recall interesting experiences or memorable scenes, to limit your paper to what you could relate vividly in a short paper, and to arrange your material in either a time or space sequence.

In expository writing, these matters are more difficult. Often you can't think of anything to write about. Or if you decide on a general subject, like television or education, you can't determine how to restrict it to a manageable topic you can explain intelligently in a short paper. Then when you do select a topic, you find it difficult to organize your ideas because neither time nor space arrangements will do the trick. Also, in writing expository papers you are bound by another convention. Because readers expect explanation rather than entertainment, they want to know early what your paper is about. Consequently, you need to provide a thesis statement,

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Illustration 2

expressing the thesis or main idea, somewhat like the focusing statement in descriptions or personal essays.

Therefore, expository writing is usually more difficult and demanding than personal and descriptive writing. Consequently, you should spend more time and energy in the process of pre-writing, thus preparing yourself more completely for writing your paper. To help you, we will consider in some detail each of the four steps mentioned previously. We have arranged these steps in chronological order, even though not everyone follows this order. But the final three steps are always dependent upon the first.

SELECTING A TOPIC

Quite often, in college and later, at work, you will be assigned a topic. Your history, sociology, or psychology instructor will suggest certain ideas or problems, or your boss at work will ask you to get out a memo or letter about a specific matter. And your English instructor may assign topics from an essay collection, this book, or another source. But what if you have to come up with one of your own? Or what if one is assigned, but it leaves you blank?

You can wait for an inspiration, but you may wait for months. If one comes while you are daydreaming through a lecture or listening to music, fine. So much the better. But what if it doesn't? What then? Try one or both of these methods: brainstorming and inventing.

Brainstorming

Brainstorming requires your writing down any feasible idea that comes to mind. It necessitates concentrating for about thirty minutes to produce a list of ideas. During this time, search through your bag of interests, hobbies, gripes, likes, and worries. Think about whatever preoccupies your friends, father, mother, brother or sister, aunt or uncle, grandparents, neighbors, high school teacher, coach, doctor, clergyman, druggist, mailcarrier, or any of the other people you customarily talk to. What do you converse about after the weather and their health? Write down any possible subject. Then think about the conversations you've had during the past few days with friends. List again. Also review recent class lectures and discussions that interested you. List them. Finally, flip through some newspapers or magazines for ideas. List, list, list. And in the process, write down any related ideas. A thought that hardly any TV characters worry about money might lead you through association to such other omissions as the relative lack of handicapped, old, fat, or divorced people on television. What is important is to generate ideas. Afterwards you can discard the unappealing or impractical ones.

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Illustration 3

Invention

If brainstorming fails to produce an interesting topic, try inventing one. Here's one way to go about it. Select some broad subject of interest, such as automobiles, camping, medicine, or sports. Then narrow your focus somewhat—say, from sports to football. Finally, run this subject through the perspective of various academic disciplines. Here's how to go about it, using football as an example:

Academic discipline	*Topics*
Agriculture:	Comparison of grass field and artificial turf
Architecture:	Football stadiums: covered or open; design; sightlines; comfort; accessibility; parking arrangements
Art:	Pageantry of college football games
Economics:	Cost of tickets, food, parking; expense of football team
Engineering:	Machines used in practice or exercise; computer-aided defense
Health:	Football injuries
History:	The game past and present; rule changes; change in top teams
Music:	Unappreciated role of bands; marching bands; halftime performances
Law:	——
Literature:	Depiction of football players in novels, films, plays
Religion:	Nature and purpose of opening prayer; football and character-building
Science:	Application of scientific principles to training; off-season conditioning

And, for good luck (or good ideas) you might throw in these additional perspectives, or some of your own:

Social life:	Tailgating; football dating; victory parties
Future:	Changes in the game
Feminism:	Football for women; women playing on men's teams
Contrast:	Football and soccer, baseball, tennis
Comparison:	Football and big business; coach as corporate executive
Children:	Danger of children playing football
Television:	Impact of TV on football games

This invention system comes with no money-back guarantees. You may strike many blanks as we did with Law. Or you may hit on many ideas but

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pre-writing and exposition p. 196

Illustration 4

selecting a topic p. 197

brainstorming p. 197

invention p. 198

pre-writing and exposition p. 196

What would you do before starting? Why? What is exposition?

Illustration 5

selecting a topic p. 197

How do you begin to think of something to write about?

brainstorming p. 197

What is it?

invention p. 198

How do I do it?

Illustration

6

pre-writing and exposition p. 196

What would you do before starting? Why? What is exposition?

select topic
limit
thesis
plan

more difficult than retelling a story

selecting a topic p. 197

How do you begin to think of something to write about?

be inspired
brainstorm
invent

Illustration 7

brainstorming p. 197

What is it?

jot any idea you get —
dig through your mind

invention p. 198

How do I do it?

Use a big topic, narrow it,
and use "different perspectives"
to consider it

expressing the thesis or main idea, somewhat like the focusing statement in descriptions or personal essays.

Therefore, expository writing is usually more difficult and demanding than personal and descriptive writing. Consequently, you should spend more time and energy in the process of pre-writing, thus preparing yourself more completely for writing your paper. To help you, we will consider in some detail each of the four steps mentioned previously. We have arranged these steps in chronological order, even though not everyone follows this order. But the final three steps are always dependent upon the first.

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Illustration 9

none that suit your fancy. But either invention or brainstorming should be far more helpful than waiting for an inspiration, wringing your hands, or moaning, "I can't think of anything."

Also, nothing is sacred about these methods. You will not be graded on how many categories you can fill or how many ideas you can develop. Use them any way you wish to find and decide on a topic or to generate additional ideas. They are ways to help you when you feel helpless.

The Final Choice

So far we've been concerned with generating ideas for a topic. Assuming you have found several, which one should you choose?

One important consideration in choosing a topic, of course, is your purpose—writing the paper. Many of the topics that have been generated here lend themselves better to certain kinds of exposition than to others. Because "tailgating," for instance, in the sense of picnicking from the tailgate of a station wagon, is a relatively new use for this word, you might want to give your readers an extended definition of the term. The topic under Architecture suggests a classification, while the two under Science seem to necessitate a process description. Others seem more appropriate to analysis: comparison of grass field versus artificial turf; the historical changes; attitudes or opinions you might have about injuries or women's participation in football.

development goes with content

Another important consideration in choosing a topic is the kind of audience you plan to address. Readers who are football players would be more interested in technical aspects of the game than in the stadium parties; teachers or parents might find a paper on the character-building potential of football more to their liking than a discussion of football as big business.

But important also is that the topic appeal to you, as well as to your readers. If you are not interested in a subject, you will find it difficult to interest others, which is part of your writing commitment. Sometimes we suspect a national student conspiracy to bore freshman English instructors because they are a captive audience required to read all papers. We urge instead a campaign to interest all readers—instructors, classmates, and others.

trust yourself

A related consideration is the complexity of a topic. No matter how much it interests you, if you don't know quite a bit about a topic and don't have the time to do research, forget it. On the other hand, don't feel you have to be an expert. Whether you realize it or not, you bring a different perspective and fresh thoughts to a subject even though you may not know everything about it. If you are reasonably informed about it, you can say something interesting and worthwhile.

too big — too much

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The final choice

How do I decide?

What is or is not O.K.?

The final choice

The topic must fit the method of development.
(example: tailgating would be a definition theme)

The audience the paper is for helps to control the topic.

You need to like the topic to use it.

Don't try an overly complex topic--
research takes time.

Illustration 11

RESTRICTING THE TOPIC

Thus far in our discussion of pre-writing, we've tried to suggest a method and to set up some criteria for choosing a topic. Next you must consider whether the topic is suitable for your purpose, or whether it is too broad for a short paper.

a little in detail is much

Most students err in selecting a topic too huge to handle. Understandably, they feel more secure with a broad subject, confident they can grind out a paper long enough to fulfill the assignment. Thus it seems safer to write about cooking than about a more restricted subject like crockpot cookery. But remember, the aim of writing an expository paper is to explain something in great detail. In a short paper, no writer can do justice to a subject as vast as cooking.

One way to test the scope of your topic is to write a rough draft. If you can only come up with one page, the topic is too restricted; but if you find yourself writing four or five pages on one aspect, the subject is obviously too broad. Another way is to see how many main ideas you would have to discuss in order to cover the subject thoroughly. If three or four main points are adequate, then you are safe to assume that your topic is sufficiently restricted. However, more than that indicates that you need to narrow the subject further—to shift to a more specific, particular treatment.

For example, let's say you want to write a paper about the growing popularity of sports. Because that subject includes both spectator and participant sports, you can see that to deal with both would require a volume. You would be well advised to narrow it to one or the other. Taking participant sports, you might consider the growing popularity of sports that fit the classification: golf, tennis, running, cycling, soccer, volleyball, and so on. Aha! you think. There certainly is enough here to write about. But can you explain about each sport, relate it to other participant sports, and express your views about them? Not in a short paper. True, you could write a classification paper, but if your purpose is to express an opinion or present a viewpoint about the subject, the topic is still too broad; any explanation would be highly superficial. And so you need to narrow your topic still further. Choosing one sport to talk about would solve your problem. Consequently, you might decide to write on the growing popularity of soccer.

or tennis or golf or baseball

Your next step, then, is to generate three or four main points that you would like to make. For instance, you could write about the availability of soccer fields, the comparatively low cost of equipment, the relatively low risk of serious injuries, the ease of learning to play, or the fact that it is a team sport, enjoyable for all. Out of these, you can choose the three or four main points that you feel best explain the growing popularity of soccer. Thus, you have now restricted your subject to a workable length. By the time you have finished this second step, you are well on your way to the third—formulating a thesis idea.

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Restricting the Topic

What and how do I restrict? Why?

Restricting the Topic

Is topic too broad?

Try a rough draft.

Don't let points to cover go over three or four.